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Help Wanted: Assistant Teacher Policies in State-Funded Preschool

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ABOUT NIEER

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Most state-funded preschool programs require two adults in each classroom, typically a lead teacher and an assistant teacher.¹ Assistant teachers² are an integral part of the early childhood classroom and take on many responsibilities, including planning and implementing educational activities and supporting individual children and small groups. In addition, they often bring linguistic, cultural, and racial/ethnic diversity to the classroom teaching team. As such a critical part of the preschool teaching team, assistants should be valued for their role in the classroom, appropriately qualified to support children’s learning and development, and adequately compensated.

In this report, using data from NIEER’s *2024 State of Preschool Yearbook*, we summarize the state preschool policies related to assistant teacher qualification requirements, strategies to meet those requirements, compensation policies, and professional development (PD) supports available to (and required for) assistant teachers. We also identify and explore the ways some states have addressed pay and health benefit equity that are inclusive of assistant teachers in state-funded preschool programs. Finally, we offer recommendations for state policymakers, such as state legislators or early childhood preschool administrators, to consider when developing and amending preschool assistant teacher policies.

¹ A few preschool programs do not require two teachers in preschool classrooms. The most common exception occurs in “transitional kindergarten” (TK) programs, which are a downward extension of the kindergarten program that serves five- and six-year-old children. Currently the two TK programs included in the Yearbook operate in California and Washington.

² Assistant teachers sometimes have other titles, including aides, associate teachers, paraeducators, and paraprofessionals, but for this paper, we will refer to them as assistant teachers.



Preschool Teaching Staff

Most preschool classrooms include a teaching team comprised of a lead and an assistant teacher. Research has demonstrated that the quality of interactions between teachers and students is a key factor in supporting children’s learning and development (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Pianta, 2016; Pianta et al., 2020; Whittaker et al., 2024), and this includes both lead and assistant teachers. However, work in the early childhood education field tends to focus on lead rather than assistant teachers, who are the focus of this report.

It is difficult to establish one standard set of job duties for assistant teachers or clearly define their role in the preschool classroom as compared to lead teachers due to limited research (Curby et al., 2012; Jacoby, 2025; Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2012). In addition, duties or tasks specified in assistant teacher job descriptions, that preschool programs implement, vary by state policies the preschool system must meet (Garver et al., 2023; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Weisenfeld et al., 2023). Some research has found that preschool assistant teachers serve as co-teachers, having similar responsibilities to lead teachers (e.g., planning, instruction, setting up the environment, assessing children, etc.) (e.g., Curby et al., 2012; Mowrey & Farran, 2021). However, the balance of direct contact with children to non-teaching work (e.g., prepping, cleaning, etc.) may not be equal (e.g., Mowrey & Farran, 2021; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2017). In a recent study of eighty public preschool classrooms, both lead teachers and assistant teachers provided instruction (whole group, small group, and/or individually with one child) (Mowrey & Farran, 2021). While assistant teachers spent less time on instruction relative to classroom management and preparing materials, instructing preschoolers was still an important task for assistant teachers and was often done independently, without the supervision of the lead teacher.

In addition to being able to provide more contact with preschool children, another advantage of having a teaching team is the likelihood of having a more diverse teaching staff. Research suggests that when preschool children have a teacher with a racial match to their own identity, they may have improved educational outcomes (e.g., Soliday Hong et al., 2023; Knox-Lane et al., 2022; Downer et al., 2016). Research also points to the benefits of a language match between preschoolers and their teachers (Nores et al., in preparation). It is therefore important to have a racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse teaching team to work with a diverse student population. The [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment \(CSCCE\)](#), which studies the entire early childhood workforce, found that among center-based teaching staff, assistant teachers were slightly more likely than lead teachers to speak another language and be Asian or Latina relative to Black or White (McLean et al., 2024). Similarly, a study of thirty-eight Head Start classrooms found that assistant teachers had higher rates of multilingualism and racial/ethnic diversity than lead teachers (Jacoby, 2021).

Although assistant teachers play an important role in the preschool classroom, the policies that support this position often do not meet the minimum standards needed for creating a high-quality program and supporting children in ways that foster positive developmental outcomes and learning.

State Preschool Policies for Assistant Teachers

Annually, NIEER releases the [State of Preschool](#) report that examines state-funded preschool policies in every state-funded preschool program in the country. Information is collected on child enrollment, state spending, and state policies that support quality. NIEER compares states' policies against ten [research-based policy benchmarks](#) that are viewed as the *minimum standards* needed to support a high-quality preschool program.³ Two of these benchmarks include policies specifically related to assistant teachers:

- **Assistant teacher degree benchmark.** To meet this benchmark, state policy must require all assistant teachers to hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or have equivalent preparation based on coursework, which is at least 9 to 12 credits. The 2015 Institute of Medicine and National Research Council *Transforming the Workforce Report*, Research has emphasized that preschool teachers should have preparation that includes child development knowledge and pedagogy for preschool-aged children. To support entry-level positions, such as assistant teachers, the CDA was developed. In 2023-2024, only 21 programs out of 64 (33%) state-funded preschool programs met or exceeded the *Assistant teacher degree benchmark*, see Table 1. It is important to note that these are the *minimum* requirements for assistant teachers. A few states exceed this requirement by requiring an AA degree in early childhood education/child development.
- **Staff professional development benchmark.** Meeting this benchmark requires that **both lead and assistant teachers** have at least 15 hours of in-service training per year and annual written individualized PD plans. In addition, PD must include coaching/job-embedded classroom support for all classrooms. This is supported by research that suggests regular PD, including coaching/job-embedded support, that includes assistant teachers or classroom teaching teams, is positively correlated to high-quality experiences for preschool children (e.g., Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Kraft et al., 2018; Schachner et al., 2024; Jacoby, 2021). In 2023-2024, only 19 programs out of 64 (30%) met or exceeded the *Staff professional development benchmark*, see Table 1.

These two benchmarks are the two least commonly met among state-funded preschool programs, suggesting that policies to support assistant teachers tend to be of lower priority for states compared to policies to support lead teachers. In comparison, 31 programs met the benchmark requiring lead teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree and 47 programs met the benchmark requiring lead teachers to have specialized pre-service training in ECE.

Even though more than two-thirds of state-funded preschool programs did not meet these benchmarks, they may have met some of the criteria by developing policies that support assistant teachers. In some cases, policies are in place for assistant teachers in public schools but not in other settings within state pre-k, like child care centers. For the one-third of programs that did meet the benchmarks, there are various policy decisions states made while designing their preschool policies in order to implement these higher standards. Some of these policies and decision points are explained in the following sections.

³ For more information on the research base and the criteria for meeting all ten NIEER benchmarks, see: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Qualifications Requirements for Assistant Teachers

The most common pre-employment requirement for assistant teachers employed in a state-funded preschool program is the obtainment of the CDA credential or its equivalent. The center-based Preschool CDA is a nationally developed competency-based credential that includes training, preschool work experience, completion of a professional portfolio, a CDA verification visit, and an exam (Council for Professional Recognition, 2025).

During the 2023-2024 school year, 32 state-funded preschool programs had no state education qualification policy for assistant teachers, assistant teacher policies were determined locally (not set by the state), and/or state policy only required assistant teachers to have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent **in at least one setting** (e.g., for programs operating in child care centers) (see Table 2). In one program, the only requirement for assistant teachers is to be at least 16 years old and continuously enrolled in high school or a high school equivalency class. One-third of preschool programs (21 out of 64 preschool programs) required all assistant teachers to obtain at least a CDA or equivalent (see Table 2). This is the minimum requirement for meeting NIEER's *Assistant teacher degree benchmark*.

Several of the programs that met the *Assistant teacher degree benchmark* do not require just a CDA but rather include an equivalency option through coursework. Some examples of CDA equivalency include a specific minimum number of early childhood education/child development (ECE/CD) college courses (e.g., Alabama: 9 ECE/CD credits, Arkansas: 12 ECE/CD credits, Missouri Quality Preschool Grant: 9 ECE/CD credits, Nebraska: 12 ECE/CD credits, and Rhode Island: 9 or more ECE/CD credits). Hawaii identifies the specific ECE/CD courses that would meet the requirements for a CDA equivalent.

In addition to a CDA option, a few states have developed state-specific credentials or certificates that include ECE/CD coursework that preschool assistant teachers could obtain to meet the CDA equivalency. For example:

- **Arkansas:** Birth to Pre-K Credential and Technical Certificate in ECE/CD requires 24 Early Childhood Education coursework hours in ECE and/or CD.
- **Maine:** Educational Technician II (Maine DOE Certificate) requires a minimum of 60 college credit hours, including at least 9 credits in ECE or a related field.
- **Washington Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP):** Washington State Early Childhood Education Certificate or equivalent (12 credits).
- **Mississippi Early Learning Collaborative (ELC)** allows Montessori certification as a CDA equivalent.

NIEER has collected data on state policies to support state-funded preschool programs since the 2001-2002 school year. Over this time, consistently, one-third of programs have met the *Assistant teacher degree benchmark* (NIEER, n.d.). While some states have shifted policies to either meet or lose the benchmark, and the programs that operate have changed over time, the percentage of programs meeting the benchmark has remained relatively constant. One example of a state that made changes to the assistant teacher preschool policies is North Carolina, which added the requirement that NC Pre-K assistant teachers must have a CDA in the 2022-2023 school year (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2024). If assistant teachers did not have a CDA or 9 ECE/CD credits at the time of hire, then they needed to complete the requirement by the end of the 2023-2024 school year (NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

Support for Meeting Qualifications

A number of state preschool programs have established scholarship opportunities and timelines to support assistant teachers in meeting qualifications, given the importance of qualifications and educational attainment for earning higher wages (Isaacs et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2023). We have identified several innovative state policies to support the assistant teacher workforce. While they do not all meet NIEER's *Assistant teacher degree benchmark*, they do provide assistance to help assistant teachers work towards high credentials. To meet the requirements for the benchmark (e.g., obtaining a CDA or equivalent), qualifications must be met prior to employment or within two years of employment.

WORK EXPERIENCE. SOME STATES DO NOT REQUIRE SPECIFIC COURSEWORK, CERTIFICATION, OR LICENSURE, BUT INSTEAD ONLY REQUIRE PRIOR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH PRESCHOOLERS (E.G., ARIZONA AND SOUTH CAROLINA). OTHER STATES OFFER EXPERIENCE AS ONE OF SEVERAL OPTIONS TO MEET THE ASSISTANT TEACHER PRE-EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS (E.G., NEBRASKA AND TEXAS). WHILE PREVIOUSLY WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN MAY BE VALUABLE, HAVING ONLY PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE, WITHOUT ECE COURSEWORK, DOES NOT MEET THE NIEER ASSISTANT TEACHER BENCHMARK.

Scholarships. Some states have supported assistant teachers in meeting qualifications through scholarships, such as through the national [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®](#) program and through developing state-specific opportunities. The T.E.A.C.H. program provides scholarships and support to eligible early educators, including assistant teachers. T.E.A.C.H. eligibility is determined by each of the 22 states that currently participate, but generally depends on the minimum number of hours one works per week rather than the educator's role.

Several states have developed their own scholarship programs. For example:

- [Georgia's DECAL Scholars Program](#) offers several scholarships, including one specifically for obtaining a CDA.
- Hawaii legislatively established the [Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program](#) to cover the tuition costs for both lead and assistant teachers.
- New Mexico's [Opportunity Scholarship](#) provides tuition assistance for eligible New Mexico residents who are pursuing a training certificate, AA degree, or a BA degree at a New Mexico public college or university.
- Virginia's [G3 tuition assistance program](#) supports students working towards a career in the state's six most in-demand industries, including education. Students qualify for state financial aid based on having a household income of about \$111,000 for a family of four (400% FPL). Each of Virginia's 23 community colleges has a list of approved G3 programs.
- Washington's [Early Achievers Grant](#) supports educators in pursuing an ECE Stackable Certificate or an ECE AA degree.

Timeline. For the states that require educational qualifications for assistant teachers, most require that they be obtained before being hired. Some state preschool programs, however, provide a defined time period to meet the qualification requirements. Requiring individual PD plans for assistant teachers may help states track progress that assistant teachers are making on meeting the state's assistant teacher qualifications policy (see Table 3).

- In Delaware, Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program, Oregon's Prenatal to Kindergarten, and Pennsylvania's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, assistant teachers must complete their qualification requirements within two years. This timeline is aligned with requirements for the federal Head Start program.

- North Carolina has several options for meeting the assistant teacher qualification requirements. Those doing so via the AA degree qualification option are required to complete a minimum of six semester hours per year. To help track progress, the documentation must be maintained in the individual's staff records and available for review.

Recruiting Assistant Teachers

Several states have developed strategies to increase the recruitment of assistant teachers. One strategy some states have used to recruit potential teachers, including assistant teachers, is developing innovative pathway programs starting with high school students. Additionally, some states communicate their specific ECE requirements and career opportunities on their websites to prevent potential early childhood workforce candidates from becoming disillusioned with the complicated requirements necessary to apply for positions.

Innovative Pathways. The following are a few examples of innovative ways states have developed programs to support assistant teachers to enter the field with the required state education qualifications.

- The Alabama [Department of Early Childhood Education \(ACDECE\)](#) operates some of its First Class Pre-K (FCPK) classrooms in high school settings. High school students enrolled in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program can complete a CDA while in high school, which would allow them to serve as assistant teachers in FCPK or in other similar roles in the ECE field. Students can use the FCPK classrooms to satisfy some of the 480 hours of preschool work experience that are required for the CDA. Additionally, some high school students are also earning their 9-hour ECE certificates via dual enrollment (high school and community college).
- Colorado used federal relief dollars to offer free ECE/CD coursework to new and/or potential early childhood teachers with the intent of bringing new professionals into the field, but also supporting the transition of assistant teachers to lead teachers from fall 2021 through spring 2024 (Shields & Franko, 2023; Colorado Department of Early Childhood, 2025).
- Kansas created and is working to expand its [Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program \(RTAP\)](#) for high school students interested in studying early childhood education.



Communicating Qualifications. Two examples include Washington and Oregon, which have created interactive databases that enable users to understand early education pathways for multiple positions and careers in the ECE field. Oregon's [Your Path in Early Childhood Education](#) includes an [Occupation Profile](#) page for Education Assistants, which features the number of job openings per year, 10-year growth projections, a job description, and current job openings. In Washington's [Qualifications, Role Requirements, & Training](#) landing page, visitors can find pre-service and hiring requirements and education for ECEAP Assistant Teachers.

Professional Development Opportunities for Assistant Teachers

To be part of a teaching “team” requires that both lead and assistant teachers participate in joint professional development (PD) that encompasses mentoring, peer learning experiences, and/or participation in discussions with peers during meetings (Weisenfeld et al., 2023). Unfortunately, current PD requirements are not equal for lead and assistant teachers. In most state-funded preschool programs, lead teachers are included in ongoing PD opportunities and are required to participate in them annually. On the other hand, assistant teachers may be offered PD opportunities but are often not expected, or even encouraged, to attend. Unequal access to PD for assistant teachers can have negative implications for instructional quality, with research in both general and special education settings suggesting that assistants are often not provided with training necessary to implement more complex instructional practices (Mowrey & Farran, 2022).

The NIEER *Staff professional development benchmark* focuses on three components of effective PD: 1) professional development hours, often specified on an annual basis; 2) coaching or job-embedded training that occurs within the classroom during the preschool day; and 3) a tracking system, often referred to as an individual PD plan. These benchmark requirements are grounded in research suggesting that ongoing, individualized PD and coaching support teaching practices related to high-quality experiences for children (Egert et al., 2018; Schacter et al., 2025; Weiland and Yoshikawa, 2021).

Professional Development Hours. The NIEER *Staff professional development benchmark* requires that both lead and assistant teachers receive at least 15 hours per year of PD. This requirement is aligned with the current [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#), which also require 15 hours per year of PD for all teaching staff. Setting minimum PD hours for both lead and assistant teachers helps ensure that the full teaching team has continuous opportunities to develop skills and competencies in support of high-quality instruction. Over 70 percent of state preschool programs (45 out of 64) require both lead and assistant teachers across all settings to participate in regular PD hours. However, the number of hours varies by setting in some of these programs (e.g., Nevada requires 6 credit hours/5 years for both lead and assistant teachers in public schools, and 24 clock hours/year for those in nonpublic schools), or position, see Table 4. Two examples of varying by position include:

- Alabama requires 30 clock hours/year for lead teachers and 20/year for assistant teachers; and
- Maine requires 6 credit hours/5 years for lead teachers and 3 credit hours/5 years for assistant teachers.

The remaining 19 programs have either no requirement for some or all assistants but a requirement for lead teachers, or no requirement for lead and assistant teachers.

- State policies for 12 preschool programs do not require PD hours for assistant teachers but do require at least some lead teachers to attend PD trainings.
- Connecticut Smart Start, Iowa SWVPP, and Wisconsin 4K are the only programs without a state policy that explicitly defines PD requirements for any teachers beyond allowing programs to determine requirements locally.
- In nine state-funded preschool programs with requirements for both lead and assistant teachers, lead teachers are required to have more annual PD hours than assistant teachers. However, six of these programs require at least 15 hours a year for assistant teachers.

Coaching. To meet the NIEER *Staff professional development benchmark*, all classrooms must receive coaching or other forms of job-embedded training. We explored whether state preschool policies address coaching specifically for assistant teachers, given their critical role in classroom instruction and the importance of ensuring that all educators have access to professional growth opportunities. During the 2023-2024 school year, about two-thirds of preschool programs (41 out of 64) required at least some teachers to participate in coaching (see Table 5). However, who is required to participate in coaching varies:

- Twenty-two programs required ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided for both lead and assistant teachers in all settings where the program operates.
- For the programs that required coaching, most have the same requirements for coaching support in public and nonpublic schools. Only a few programs have different requirements by setting, such as the District of Columbia, Iowa, Kentucky, and New York, which require coaching for some lead teachers in public settings (e.g., only new teachers, those with specific licenses or certified, etc.), but not for lead teachers in nonpublic settings or assistant teachers in either setting.

Use of Professional Development Plans. In 2023-2024, half of the state’s preschool programs (32 out of 64, 50%) required lead and assistant teachers in all settings to have individual PD plans, see Table 3. In addition:

- Less than one-third of programs do not require professional development plans for assistants in public or nonpublic settings. Fourteen programs (22%) have more rigorous requirements for lead teachers than for assistant teachers.
- In Tennessee, the VPK Scope of Services specifies that all VPK educators, including assistant teachers, “have a data-driven professional development plan identifying specific training and job-embedded professional learning opportunities to meet staff needs to improve classroom practices” (TN DOE, n.d., p.3).
- Some states require PD plans, but only for those lead and assistant teachers who have not met qualifications (e.g., Connecticut Child Day Care Contracts (CDCC) and School Readiness (SR), Missouri Foundation Formula, and Oregon Preschool Promise), and/or are receiving state scholarship funds (e.g., Connecticut CDCC and SR).

Strategies to Support Collaboration. One way to support collaborative teaching is through requiring the teaching team, i.e., lead and assistant teachers, to participate in professional development opportunities together. For example, in Alabama, individual PD plans are required for each classroom. This allows the program to implement a tiered model of coaching, so the teaching team is continuously setting goals and self-reflecting throughout the year. In West Virginia, state statute ([WVBE Policy 2525](#)) requires that lead and assistant teachers participate in at least 15 hours of staff development annually, based on the needs determined in the county continuous quality improvement process. In Florida, for VPK providers that implement a new pre-K curriculum, state policy requires that lead and assistant teachers complete the required PD to implement the curriculum. In addition, some state preschool programs require that assistant teachers work under the supervision or mentoring of the lead teachers (e.g., California CSPP and Illinois).

Salary & Benefits for Assistant Teachers

ECE teachers (including lead and assistant teachers in public schools and nonpublic settings) are one of the lowest-paid sectors in the United States and are over-represented in government assistance programs (Dade & McLean, 2023; Lee et al., 2023; McClean et al., 2024). When compared to elementary and middle school teachers, on average, ECE teachers (lead and assistants) are paid much less (\$13.07 per hour vs. \$31.80 per hour) and have poverty rates that are 5.7 times higher (McLean et al., 2024). When isolating assistant teachers’ wages, the situation is even more extreme. In a California wage study, researchers found that the median annual wages were \$90,000 for TK lead teachers and \$43,700 for TK assistants (all are public school

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP A SALARY SCALE?
“WHEN DESIGNED EFFECTIVELY, SALARY SCALES ARE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS CHRONIC CHALLENGES WITH LOW ECE WORKFORCE COMPENSATION. FURTHER, THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A SALARY SCALE IS, IN AND OF ITSELF, VALUABLE; THIS PROCESS CREATES A STARTING POINT FOR CHANGE, CONVERSATION, AND ANALYSIS FOCUSED ON SYSTEMATIC IMPROVEMENTS IN ECE WORKFORCE WAGES.”**

Source: National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance. (2024). Early care and education workforce salary scale playbook: Implementation guide. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood Development, p. 5

teachers working school-year schedules), and \$48,900 for center-based lead teachers compared to \$41,600 for assistant teachers (typically working year-round schedules) (Powell and Muruvi, 2025). The 2024 average salary listed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for Teacher Assistants (some college, no degree) who work in schools or child care settings is \$35,240 per year (BLS, 2025).

One of the actions state preschool programs can implement to help remedy this situation is to develop policies that support adequate pay compensation. One way to accomplish this is by implementing policies that require comparable pay for preschool lead and assistant teachers with public schools based on position (e.g., paying ECE assistant teachers comparably to K-12 assistant teachers). Unfortunately, very few preschool programs have comprehensive policies to support compensation parity for lead and/or assistant teachers across all preschool settings. For example:

- Fourteen preschool programs have the same starting salary as K-3 public school teachers for pre-K lead teachers in all settings the program operates; and 10 of these programs do so for both the lead teachers and assistant teachers in all of the settings, see Table 6.
- Eleven preschool programs have the same starting salary for both lead teachers and assistants, but only in some of the settings the program operates. For example, Nevada Ready! State Pre-K has the same starting salary for all lead teachers, but only assistant teachers in public schools.

Salary scales help ensure that educators' salaries keep up with inflation and increase as years of service increase, as well as when additional qualifications are achieved (see Text Box). For more information and resources on developing a salary scale, see [Education Workforce Salary Scale Playbook: Implementation Guide \(2024\)](#).

- Only five preschool programs (California TK, Hawaii EOEL & SPSCP, Mississippi SIP, and Oklahoma OPK) have established salary scales that include both lead teachers and assistants for all of the settings in which the program operates, see Table 6. In addition, these programs also have the same pre-K (assistant and lead teacher) starting salary as K-3 teachers and require health benefits in all settings. California and Mississippi have another program (CSPP and ELC, respectively) that operates in a mixed-delivery setting, but CSPP does not have salary or benefit policies for assistant or lead teachers, and Mississippi ELC has policies only for those lead and assistant teachers in public schools.
- New Jersey is the only state preschool program that operates in both public and nonpublic settings and has a policy in place requiring that public preschool teachers and teacher assistants in all settings are compensated based on school district salary scales.
- An additional 11 preschool programs that operate in mixed-delivery settings have salary scales for lead and assistant teachers, but only in public school settings. Most of these programs also offer health benefits for lead and assistant teachers in public school settings, see Table 6.
- Rhode Island includes most preschool teachers (assistant and lead teachers in public schools, and assistant teachers in nonpublic settings) in their salary scales. Work is being done to rectify this pay discrepancy, but it is safe to say that public school teachers outpace the other parts of the mixed delivery system year on year. Similarly, Tennessee has policies to support health benefits for lead teachers in all settings but for assistant teachers only in public settings.

Pay Parity Funds. Both New Mexico and the District of Columbia have tried to address pay equity through the creation of pay parity funds.

- The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) established the [ECECD Wage Supplement Program](#) to provide wage supplements to early childhood educators, including assistant teachers, to meet pay parity with public school teachers. Qualification criteria requirements (e.g., number of ECE credits earned, years of experience, number of regular hours worked, current wages, etc.) are established by ECECD and include that recipients must work in a New Mexico-funded ECE program.



- In August 2021, the District of Columbia established the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund through the [Fiscal Year 2022 \(FY22\) Budget Support Emergency Amendment Act of 2021](#). The Act also established the [Early Childhood Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force](#) that developed a proposed salary scale for early childhood educators differentiated by role (teacher and assistant teacher) and by credential level (not setting). Initially, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) made direct payments to educators but has since switched to distributing funds to enrolled programs (OSSE, n.d.). Recent research conducted by Urban Institute has found that while some programs were able to increase salaries to align with the newly created [salary scale](#), there were some administrative challenges and issues with payment structures experienced at the program level (Parra et al., 2025).

Bonuses. Some states used federal funds (e.g., Preschool Development Grants and COVID-relief dollars) to provide bonuses to retain and/or recruit preschool teachers, and some states, such as Georgia, included assistant teachers (Garver, 2022). However, these funds were time-limited. A more lasting strategy was developing a state funding stream such as Connecticut's [Qualified Workforce Incentives \(QWI\)](#), California's [Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Program](#), and Ohio's [Powering Optimal Wages and Encouraging Retention \(POWER\)](#) program. Starting in the 2022 legislative session, bonuses for Georgia's Pre-K teachers included assistant teachers (Weisenfeld et al., 2022). In 2023-2024, bonuses were increased by \$2000 in addition to a one-time bonus of \$1,000 for both lead and assistant teachers (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025).

Summary of States' Support for Assistant Teachers

In the United States in 2023, almost half of state-funded preschool programs (31 of 64, 48%) required lead teachers to have a BA degree, and almost 75 percent (47 of 64 programs) required lead teachers to have specialized training in early childhood education, child development, or another related field. However, only one-third of state-funded preschool programs (21 of 64) required the pre-employment qualification of a CDA or equivalent for assistant teachers in all of their preschool classrooms in 2023-2024. In addition to not requiring minimal education qualifications, most state preschool programs do not include assistant teachers in salary scales or offer similar starting salaries to their K-3 public school equivalents.

States have made some progress by providing opportunities for assistant teachers to participate in ongoing PD, though much more progress is needed. During the 2023-2024 school year:

- Over 70 percent of preschool programs require both lead and assistant teachers to participate in regular PD hours. Twelve preschool states' policies did not require any PD hours for assistant teachers, but did require PD hours for at least some lead teachers.
- Twenty-one programs required ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided for both lead and assistant teachers in all settings.
- Less than one-third of programs did not require professional development plans for assistant teachers in public or nonpublic settings.
- Nineteen programs (30%) met or exceeded NIEER's *Staff professional development benchmark*, meaning that only about one-third of programs are offering what research has suggested is the minimum adequate support needed for both lead and assistant teachers in terms of PD hours, coaching, and PD plans.

Taken together, these policies not only affect children's classroom experiences but also limit assistant teachers' ability to earn a living wage and reduce their reliance on public assistance programs. Improving support and compensation for assistant teachers can also help reduce stress and retention, which will result in a stronger teaching team, benefiting the teaching staff as well as the preschoolers.

Future Policy Directions

This report examined the state preschool policies that encourage the preparedness and support of the entire preschool teaching team, with a focus on assistant teachers, who are often overlooked. Unfortunately, in the years that NIEER has been studying state preschool policies, the percentage of programs meeting the *Assistant teacher degree benchmark* has not changed, remaining around 30%. This means that many preschool assistant teachers come to the classroom unprepared to fully support children's learning and development. Once employed, assistants are typically not required to attend ongoing PD, which is a way to improve their ECE skills and knowledge. PD may be especially important for those assistant teachers who do not have pre-service training in ECE, like a CDA.

There are some policy strategies states could employ to better support assistant teachers, some of which are already happening in state preschool programs.

- **Raise assistant teacher qualifications to a CDA or equivalent.** North Carolina made a policy change that now requires assistant teachers in the NC Pre-K program to have a CDA or 9 ECE/CD credits at the time of hire. Having the option of obtaining college credits in ECE/CD may be more appealing to those who are working toward a college degree.
- **Support increase pay aligned with qualifications.** New Mexico and the District of Columbia have established pay parity funds that are inclusive of assistant teachers, leading to increased salaries.

While many states have developed similar strategies, what is unique about these two programs is that they are not dependent upon funding from temporary federal sources (e.g., COVID relief dollars or a PDG grant) (Gale, 2025; McLean et al., 2024).

- ***Develop policies that address starting salary, salary scale, and health care benefits parity that are inclusive of assistant teachers.*** The ultimate goal is to have strong preschool teaching teams. Assistant teacher turnover rates were significantly higher in programs that did not have wage and benefit policies (Hur et al., 2023). Given that assistant teachers are integral members of the teaching team, limiting turnover is important for supporting children’s learning and development, and improving compensation may help accomplish this.
- ***Offer, require, and support assistant teachers to participate in ongoing PD.*** States can strengthen preschool teaching teams by prioritizing access to ongoing learning opportunities, including job-embedded coaching and mentoring. Alabama does this by reserving about 8% of state preschool funding for coaching and instructional supports, as well as providing paid planning time so that all teachers can actively participate in coaching (Schachne et al., 2024). When programs already have coaching in place for lead teachers, extending these supports to include assistant teachers may require little additional lift, especially when coaches are already coming to the classrooms. For example, Oregon has developed [Coaching Competencies](#) that explicitly promote a teaching-team approach to coaching.
- ***Provide resources to complete PD and education qualifications.*** Some states have intentionally included assistant teachers in state-developed tuition reimbursement programs, e.g., Georgia’s [DECAL Scholars Program](#), Hawaii’s [Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program](#), New Mexico’s [Opportunity Scholarship](#), Virginia’s [G3 tuition assistance program](#), and Washington’s [Early Achievers Grant](#).

Assistant teachers are one of the lowest-paid professions, but are often given important responsibilities in implementing educational activities and supporting individual children and small groups. To support this valuable sector of the workforce, states must review their policies that apply to the preschool workforce to ensure that all educators, including assistant teachers, are prepared for their teaching duties, provided support, given a reasonable timeline to complete required qualifications, and receive equitable wages and benefits.

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Table 1. State Preschool Programs that Met NIEER's Assistant Teacher Degree and Staff Professional Development Benchmarks (2023-2024)

State	Preschool Program	Assistant Teacher Degree Benchmark	Staff Professional Development Benchmark
Alabama	First Class Pre-K Program	✓	✓
Alaska	Pre-Elementary Programs		
	Early Education Program Grant (EEP)		
	.5 ADM Approval Pre-K Program		
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships		
Arkansas	Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success	✓	
California	State Preschool Program (CSPP)		
	Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program		
Colorado	Universal Preschool		
Connecticut	Child Day Care Contracts		
	School Readiness		
	Smart Start		
Delaware	Early Care and Education Programs	✓	✓
District of Columbia	Universal Pre-K		
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program		
Georgia	Pre-K Program	✓	✓
Hawaii	Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	✓	✓
	State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	✓	✓
Illinois	Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion		
Iowa	Shared Visions	✓	
	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	✓	
Kansas	Preschool Offered by Public School Districts		
Kentucky	Preschool Program		
Louisiana	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program		
	Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program		
	Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)		
Maine	Public Preschool Program	✓	
Maryland	Prekindergarten Program		
Massachusetts	Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative		
	Chapter 70		
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	✓	✓
Minnesota	Head Start	✓	✓
	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP)		
Mississippi	Early Learning Collaborative	✓	✓
	State Invested Pre-Kindergarten	✓	✓
Missouri	Pre-K Foundation Formula		
	Quality Preschool Grant (MOQPK)	✓	
Nebraska	Early Childhood Education Program		
Nevada	Ready! State Pre-K		
New Jersey	Preschool Expansion Program		✓

Table 1. State Preschool Programs that Met NIEER's Assistant Teacher Degree and Staff Professional Development Benchmarks (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Assistant Teacher Degree Benchmark	Staff Professional Development Benchmark
New Mexico	PreK	✓	✓
New York	State Administered Prekindergarten Program		
North Carolina	Pre-Kindergarten Program	✓	
North Dakota	Best in Class		
Ohio	Early Childhood Education		
Oklahoma	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program		✓
Oregon	Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	✓	✓
	Preschool Promise		
Pennsylvania	Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)		
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)	✓	✓
	Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4) and School-Based Pre-K (SBP)		
	Pre-K Counts (PKC)		
Rhode Island	State Pre-kindergarten Program	✓	✓
South Carolina	Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)/ EIA Child Development Program (EIA 4K)		✓
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)		✓
Texas	Public School Prekindergarten		
Utah	Expanded Student Access to High-Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA)		
Vermont	Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)		
Virginia	Preschool Initiative (VPI)		
	Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery		
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	✓	✓
	Transition to Kindergarten (TK)		✓
West Virginia	Universal Pre-K	✓	
Wisconsin	Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)		
TOTAL	64 Programs	21 (33%)	19 (30%)

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Table 2. Minimum Assistant Teacher Education Qualification Requirements for State Preschool Program by Setting (2023-2024)

State	Preschool Program	Public School Settings	Nonpublic School Settings
Alabama	First Class Pre-K Program	CDA or 9 (or more) college credits in EC/CD	CDA or 9 (or more) college credits in EC/CD
Alaska	Pre-Elementary Programs	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
	Early Education Program Grant (EEP)	HSD or Equivalent	None
	.5 ADM Approval Pre-K Program	HSD or Equivalent	None
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships	Enrolled in HS or Equivalent	Enrolled in HS or Equivalent
Arkansas	Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success	CDA	CDA
California	State Preschool Program (CSPP)	Other**	Other**
	Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program	Other**	NA*
Colorado	Universal Preschool	Other**	Other**
Connecticut	Child Day Care Contracts	None	None
	School Readiness	None	None
	Smart Start	HSD or Equivalent	NA*
Delaware	Early Care and Education Programs	CDA	CDA
District of Columbia	Universal Pre-K	AA or Paraprofessional Certification (DCPS); Determined locally (PCS)	AA
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program	None	None
Georgia	Pre-K Program	CDA	CDA
Hawaii	Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	CDA or equivalent	NA*
	State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	CDA	NA*
Illinois	Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion	Educator License	Educator License
Iowa	Shared Visions	CDA or equivalent	CDA or equivalent
	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	CDA or equivalent	CDA or equivalent
Kansas	Preschool Offered by Public School Districts	Other**	Other**
Kentucky	Preschool Program	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Louisiana	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program	None	NA*
	Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program	None	NA*
	Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	NA*	CDA (4-year-old classrooms); HSD or Equivalent (3-year-old classrooms)
Maine	Public Preschool Program	AA at least 9 ECE credits	AA at least 9 ECE credits
Maryland	Prekindergarten Program	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Massachusetts	Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
	Chapter 70	Determined locally	NA*
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	CDA	CDA
Minnesota	Head Start	CDA	CDA
	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP)	Determined locally	Determined locally
Mississippi	Early Learning Collaborative	AA	AA
	State Invested Pre-Kindergarten	CDA or Equivalent	NA*
Missouri	Pre-K Foundation Formula	Other**	NA*
	Quality Preschool Grant (MOQPK)	CDA	CDA
Nebraska	Early Childhood Education Program	CDA, K-6 Elementary Endorsement, 6 semester hours of credit in CD or ECE, or equivalent in prior training and experience	CDA, K-6 Elementary Endorsement, 6 semester hours of credit in CD or ECE, or equivalent in prior training and experience

Table 2. Minimum Assistant Teacher Education Qualification Requirements for State Preschool Program by Setting (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Public School Settings	Nonpublic School Settings
Nevada	Ready! State Pre-K	Other**	HSD or Equivalent
New Jersey	Preschool Expansion Program	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
New Mexico	PreK	AA in ECE	AA in ECE
New York	State Administered Prekindergarten Program	Level I Teaching Assistant Certification	HSD or Equivalent
North Carolina	Pre-Kindergarten Program	CDA, AA in ECE or CD	CDA, AA in ECE or CD
North Dakota	Best in Class	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Ohio	Early Childhood Education	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Oklahoma	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program	HSD or Equivalent	NA*
Oregon	Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	CDA	CDA
	Preschool Promise	Other**	Other**
Pennsylvania	Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)	Other**	Other**
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)	CDA	CDA
	Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4) and School-Based Pre-K (SBP)	Other**	Other**
	Pre-K Counts (PKC)	Other**	Other**
Rhode Island	State Pre-kindergarten Program	HSD plus 12 college credits in ECE/CD or a CDA	HSD plus 12 college credits in ECE/CD or a CDA
South Carolina	Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)/ EIA Child Development Program (EIA 4K)	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Texas	Public School Prekindergarten	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Utah	Expanded Student Access to High-Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA)	None	None
Vermont	Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)	HSD or Equivalent	HSD or Equivalent
Virginia	Preschool Initiative (VPI)	HSD or Equivalent	None
	Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery	NA*	None
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	CDA	CDA
	Transition to Kindergarten (TK)	HSD or Equivalent	NA*
West Virginia	Universal Pre-K	CDA or state equivalent with courses on the Science of Reading and Early Childhood Mathematics	CDA or state equivalent with courses on the Science of Reading and Early Childhood Mathematics
Wisconsin	Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)	HSD or Equivalent	Other**

* The preschool program does not operate in this setting.

** For more information, see the "2023-2024 State of Pre-K Yearbook Research Appendices," in Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Table 3. State Policy Requirements for Individualized Annual Professional Development Plans for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)	
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
Alabama	First Class Pre-K Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alaska	Pre-Elementary Programs	Some ¹		✓	
	Early Education Program Grant (EEP)				
	.5 ADM Approval Pre-K Program				
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships				
Arkansas	Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success	✓	✓	✓	✓
California	State Preschool Program (CSPP)	Some ¹	Some ¹	Some ¹	Some ¹
	Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program	Determined locally	NA*	Determined locally	NA*
Colorado	Universal Preschool				
Connecticut	Child Day Care Contracts	NA*	Some**	NA*	
	School Readiness	Some ¹	Some**		
	Smart Start	✓	NA*		NA*
Delaware	Early Care and Education Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓
District of Columbia	Universal Pre-K	DCPS only	✓		✓
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program	Some**	Some**	Some**	Some**
Georgia	Pre-K Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawaii	Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
	State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Illinois	Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iowa	Shared Visions	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kansas	Preschool Offered by Public School Districts	✓	✓		
Kentucky	Preschool Program	✓			
Louisiana	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program	✓	NA*		NA*
	Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
	Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	NA*	✓	NA*	✓
Maine	Public Preschool Program				
Maryland	Prekindergarten Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Massachusetts	Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Chapter 70	✓	NA*		NA*
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minnesota	Head Start	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP)	✓	✓		
Mississippi	Early Learning Collaborative	✓	✓	✓	✓
	State Invested Pre-Kindergarten	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Missouri	Pre-K Foundation Formula	Some**	NA*		NA*
	Quality Preschool Grant (MOQPK)				
Nebraska	Early Childhood Education Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nevada	Ready! State Pre-K				
New Jersey	Preschool Expansion Program	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 3. State Policy Requirements for Individualized Annual Professional Development Plans for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)	
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
New Mexico	PreK	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York	State Administered Prekindergarten Program				
North Carolina	Pre-Kindergarten Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Dakota	Best in Class	✓	Some**		
Ohio	Early Childhood Education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oklahoma	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Oregon	Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Preschool Promise	Some**	Some**	Some**	Some**
Pennsylvania	Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)	Some**			
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4) and School-Based Pre-K (SBP)	Some**	Some**		Some**
	Pre-K Counts (PKC)	Some**	Some**	Some**	Some**
Rhode Island	State Pre-kindergarten Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
South Carolina	Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)/ EIA Child Development Program (EIA 4K)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Texas	Public School Prekindergarten				
Utah	Expanded Student Access to High-Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA)				
Vermont	Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Virginia	Preschool Initiative (VPI)				
	Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery	NA*		NA*	
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Transition to Kindergarten (TK)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
West Virginia	Universal Pre-K	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wisconsin	Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)	✓			

* The preschool program does not operate in this setting.

** For more information, see the "2023-2024 State of Pre-K Yearbook Research Appendices," in Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Table 4. State Policy Requirements for Professional Development Hours for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)		AT compared to LT
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	
Alabama	First Class Pre-K Program	30 clock hrs/yr	30 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
Alaska	Pre-Elementary Programs	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	6 credit hrs/5 yrs			None for AT
	Early Education Program Grant (EEP)	6 credit hrs/5 yrs				None for AT
	.5 ADM Approval Pre-K Program	6 credit hrs/5 yrs				None for AT
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Arkansas	Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success	30 clock hrs/yr	30 clock hrs/yr	30 clock hrs/yr	30 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
California	State Preschool Program (CSPP)	105 clock hrs/5 yrs	105 clock hrs/5 yrs	105 clock hrs/5 yrs	105 clock hrs/5 yrs	Same for both
	Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program	Varies, determined locally, and based on type of credential/permit	NA*	Varies, determined locally, and based on type of credential/permit	NA*	Same for both
Colorado	Universal Preschool	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Connecticut	Child Day Care Contracts	NA*	1% of total hrs worked	NA*	1% of total hrs worked	Same for both
	School Readiness	1% of total annual hrs worked	1% of total annual hrs worked	1% of total annual hrs worked	1% of total annual hrs worked	Same for both
	Smart Start	Determined locally	NA*	Determined locally	NA*	None for both
Delaware	Early Care and Education Programs	90 clock hrs/5 yrs	18 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
District of Columbia	Universal Pre-K	30 clock hrs/yr (DCPS); Determined locally (PCS)	21 clock hrs/yr	Offered but not required (DCPS); Determined locally (PCS)	21 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program	15 clock hrs of PD in emergent literacy in 1st year then 5 clock hrs/5 yrs	15 clock hrs of PD in emergent literacy in 1st year then 5 clock hrs/5 yrs			None for AT
Georgia	Pre-K Program	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Hawaii	Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	10 PD sessions/year	NA*	10 PD sessions/year	NA*	Same for both
	State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	60 clock hrs/yr	NA*	60 clock hrs/yr	NA*	Same for both
Illinois	Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion	120 clock hrs/5 yrs	120 clock hrs/5 yrs			None for AT
Iowa	Shared Visions	Outlined in application & determined by program standards	Outlined in application & determined by program standards	Outlined in application & determined by program standards	Outlined in application & determined by program standards	Unknown
	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	Determined Locally	Determined Locally	Determined Locally	Determined Locally	None for both
Kansas	Preschool Offered by Public School Districts	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Kentucky	Preschool Program	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
Louisiana	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program	18 clock hrs/yr	NA*	18 clock hrs/yr	NA*	Same for both
	Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program	18 clock hrs/yr	NA*	18 clock hrs/yr	NA*	Same for both
	Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	NA*	18 clock hrs/yr	NA*	18 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Maine	Public Preschool Program	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	3 credit hrs/5 yrs	3 credit hrs/5 yrs	Less for AT
Maryland	Prekindergarten Program	6 credit hours/5 years	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	Comparable

Table 4. State Policy Requirements for Professional Development Hours for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)		AT compared to LT
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	
Massachusetts	Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
	Chapter 70	150 Professional Development Points/5 yrs	NA*		NA*	None for AT
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	16 clock hrs/yr	16 clock hrs/yr	16 clock hrs/yr	16 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Minnesota	Head Start	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP)	125 clock hrs/5 yrs (licensed teachers); 10 hrs/yr (other teachers)	125 clock hrs/5 yrs (licensed teachers); 10 hrs/yr (other teachers)	At least 10 hrs/yr	At least 10 hrs/yr	Less than licensed LT
Mississippi	Early Learning Collaborative	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
	State Invested Pre-Kindergarten	15 clock hrs/yr	NA*	15 clock hrs/yr	NA*	Same for both
Missouri	Pre-K Foundation Formula	30 clock hrs/yr (teachers in yrs 1 to 4), 15 hrs/yr for other teachers until exempt	NA*		NA*	None for AT
	Quality Preschool Grant (MOQPK)	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	18 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Nebraska	Early Childhood Education Program	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Nevada	Ready! State Pre-K	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	24 clock hrs/yr	6 credit hrs/5 yrs	24 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
New Jersey	Preschool Expansion Program	100 clock hrs/5 yrs	100 clock hrs/5 yrs	100 clock hrs/5 yrs	100 clock hrs/5 yrs	Same for both
New Mexico	PreK	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
New York	State Administered Prekindergarten Program	175 clock hrs/5 yrs	175 clock hrs/5 yrs	Determined locally	Determined locally	None for AT
North Carolina	Pre-Kindergarten Program	5 to 20 clock hrs depending on the teacher's education and experience	5 to 20 clock hrs depending on the teacher's education and experience	5 to 20 clock hrs depending on the teacher's education and experience	5 to 20 clock hrs depending on the teacher's education and experience	Same for both
North Dakota	Best in Class	15 hrs/yr	15 hrs/yr	Paraprofessional requirements	Varies by setting	Unknown
Ohio	Early Childhood Education	20 clock hrs/2 yrs	20 clock hrs/2 yrs	20 clock hrs/2 yrs	20 clock hrs/2 yrs	Same for both
Oklahoma	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program	15 clock hrs/yr	NA*	15 clock hrs/yr	NA*	Same for both
Oregon	Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
	Preschool Promise	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Pennsylvania	Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)	180 clock hrs/5 yrs	180 clock hrs/5 yrs			None for AT
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
	Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4) and School-Based Pre-K (SBP)	180 clock hrs/5 yrs	Determined locally			None for AT
	Pre-K Counts (PKC)	180 clock hrs/5 yrs	180 clock hrs/5 yrs	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
Rhode Island	State Pre-kindergarten Program	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	24 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
South Carolina	Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)/ EIA Child Development Program (EIA 4K)	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)	30 hrs/school yr	30 hrs/school yr	30 hrs/school yr	30 hrs/school yr	Same for both
Texas	Public School Prekindergarten	30 clock hrs/yr	30 clock hrs/yr			None for AT
Utah	Expanded Student Access to High-Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA)	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr			None for AT

Table 4. State Policy Requirements for Professional Development Hours for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)		AT compared to LT
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	
Vermont	Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)	6 credit hrs (90 clock hrs)/5 yrs	6 credit hrs (90 clock hrs)/5 yrs	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
Virginia	Preschool Initiative (VPI)	15 clock hrs/ school yr	15 clock hrs/ school yr	15 clock hrs/ school yr	15 clock hrs/ school yr	Same for both
	Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery	NA*	16 clock hrs/ school yr	NA*	16 clock hrs/ school yr	Same for both
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	20 clock hrs/yr	20 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Less for AT
	Transition to Kindergarten (TK)	100 clock hrs/5 yrs	NA*	3 days per year of Professional Learning	NA*	Comparable
West Virginia	Universal Pre-K	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	15 clock hrs/yr	Same for both
Wisconsin	Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)					None for both

* The preschool program does not operate in this setting.

Table 5. State Policies that Require Coaching/Job-Embedded Training for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)	
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
Alabama	First Class Pre-K Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alaska	Pre-Elementary Programs				
	Early Education Program Grant (EEP)				
	.5 ADM Approval Pre-K Program				
Arizona	Quality First Scholarships				
Arkansas	Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success	Novice Teachers only	Novice Teachers only		
California	State Preschool Program (CSPP)				
	Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program		NA*		NA*
Colorado	Universal Preschool				
Connecticut	Child Day Care Contracts	NA*		NA*	
	School Readiness				
	Smart Start		NA*		NA*
Delaware	Early Care and Education Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓
District of Columbia	Universal Pre-K	DC Public Schools only			
Florida	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program				
Georgia	Pre-K Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawaii	Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
	State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Illinois	Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion	PFA Expansion only	PFA Expansion only	PFA Expansion only	PFA Expansion only
Iowa	Shared Visions	Active Teaching License only			
	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	✓			
Kansas	Preschool Offered by Public School Districts	Some**	Some**		
Kentucky	Preschool Program	Certified Teachers only			
Louisiana	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program		NA*		NA*
	Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program		NA*		NA*
	Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	NA*		NA*	
Maine	Public Preschool Program				
Maryland	Prekindergarten Program				
Massachusetts	Commonwealth Preschool Partnerships Initiative				
	Chapter 70		NA*		NA*
Michigan	Great Start Readiness Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minnesota	Head Start	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mississippi	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Early Learning Collaborative	✓	✓	✓	✓
	State Invested Pre-Kindergarten	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Missouri	Pre-K Foundation Formula	Some**	NA*		NA*
	Quality Preschool Grant (MOQPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nebraska	Early Childhood Education Program	Pyramid Model only	Pyramid Model only		

Table 5. State Policies that Require Coaching/Job-Embedded Training for Lead and Assistant Preschool Teachers (Public and Nonpublic Settings) (2023-2024) (continued)

State	Preschool Program	Lead Teachers (LT)		Assistant Teachers (AT)	
		Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
Nevada	Ready! State Pre-K				
New Jersey	Preschool Expansion Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Mexico	PreK	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York	State Administered Prekindergarten Program	First Year Teachers Only			
North Carolina	Pre-Kindergarten Program	✓	✓		
North Dakota	Best in Class	✓	✓		
Ohio	Early Childhood Education				
Oklahoma	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
Oregon	Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Preschool Promise	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pennsylvania	Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)	New Teachers only			
	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4) and School-Based Pre-K (SBP)	New Teachers only	Some		Some
	Pre-K Counts (PKC)	New Teachers only	New Teachers only		
Rhode Island	State Pre-kindergarten Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
South Carolina	Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)/ EIA Child Development Program (EIA 4K)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tennessee	Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Texas	Public School Prekindergarten				
Utah	Expanded Student Access to High-Quality School Readiness Programs (ESA)	✓	✓		
Vermont	Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)	✓	Some**	✓	Some**
Virginia	Preschool Initiative (VPI)				
	Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery	NA*		NA*	
Washington	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Transition to Kindergarten (TK)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
West Virginia	Universal Pre-K	Classrooms Collaborating with Head Start only			
Wisconsin	Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)		Some**		Some**

* The preschool program does not operate in this setting.

** For more information, see the "2023-2024 State of Pre-K Yearbook Research Appendices," in Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Table 6. State Pre-K Programs that Require Same Starting Salary, Salary Schedule, and/or Health Care (with K-3) for Lead and Assistant Teachers (2023-2024)

State & Preschool Program	Lead Teacher: Same starting salary		Assistant Teacher: Same starting salary		Lead Teacher: Same salary schedule		Assistant Teacher: Same salary schedule		Lead Teacher: Health care		Assistant Teachers: Health care	
	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
ALABAMA - First Class Pre-K	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
CALIFORNIA* - CA Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
DELAWARE - DE Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA - DC Universal Pre-K	DCPS only	✓	DCPS only	✓	DCPS only		DCPS only		DCPS only		DCPS only	
GEORGIA - GA's Pre-K Program	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓			
HAWAII*												
- HI's Executive Office on Early Learning Public Prekindergarten Program (EOEL)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
- HI State Public Charter School Early Learning Program (SPCSP)	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
IOWA*												
- IA Shared Visions (SV)	Teachers with an active license only				Teachers with an active license only				Teachers with an active license only			
- IA Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	✓				✓				✓			
KENTUCKY - KY Preschool Program	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
MAINE -ME Public Preschool Program	✓				✓				✓			
MARYLAND - MD Prekindergarten Program	✓	✓			✓				✓			
MINNESOTA* - MN Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness Plus (VPK/SRP)	✓	✓										
MISSISSIPPI*												
- MS Early Learning Collaborative	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
- MS SIP	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
NEVADA - NV Ready! State Pre-K	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			
NEW JERSEY - Preschool Expansion Program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
NEW MEXICO - NM PreK (4s) and NM Early PreK (3s) and NM Mixed Age PreK (3s & 4s)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	

Table 6. State Pre-K Programs that Require Same Starting Salary, Salary Schedule, and/or Health Care (with K-3) for Lead and Assistant Teachers (2023-2024) (continued)

State & Preschool Program	Lead Teacher: Same starting salary		Assistant Teacher: Same starting salary		Lead Teacher: Same salary schedule		Assistant Teacher: Same salary schedule		Lead Teacher: Health care		Assistant Teachers: Health care	
	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic	Public	Nonpublic
NORTH CAROLINA - NC Pre-Kindergarten Program	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
OKLAHOMA - OK Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*	✓	NA*
OREGON*												
- OR Pre-Kindergarten (OPK)	✓	✓	✓	✓								
- OR Preschool Promise (PP)	✓	✓	✓	✓								
RHODE ISLAND - RI State Prekindergarten Program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
SOUTH CAROLINA - SC Child Early Reading Development and Education Program and EIA/4K	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
TENNESSEE - TN Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)	✓				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
TEXAS - TX Public School Prekindergarten	✓				✓							
VERMONT - VT Universal Prekindergarten Education (Act 166)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
VIRGINIA* - VA Preschool Initiative	✓				✓				✓			
WASHINGTON* - Washington Transitional Kindergarten (TK)	✓	NA*		NA*	✓	NA*		NA*	✓	NA*		NA*
WEST VIRGINIA - WV Universal Pre-K	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	

* The preschool program does not operate in this setting.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.